Depot Town Rag

Volume 13, Number 5 *"All the news in one block in one month*

100% FREE Rag content

MAY 1990

Joe Thompson remembers:
south side of Cross Street
Gus Macker Tournament

Frog Island Festival

Coal Yard parking

. . . and other strictly local stuff

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

DEPOT PEOPLE:"Time Travels in Fashion" Sunday, May 6

Brenda Knox, of Designs on You Stichin' Shop, makes plans for the style show to be held at 4:30, Sunday, May 6 in the Freighthouse. The event will feature local models in clothing from 1890 through 1990 to be complimented by 100 years of music, song and dance. Admission is $6 for adults, $4.50 for seniors, $3.50 for children.

Blues Fest success leads to Heritage Jazz Competition

Another winner for JAZZ:

The Heritage Fest Jazz Fund-raising raffle held April 7 saw Juanita McCray draw the winner -- Janet Werda, of Ann Arbor, won four 17th row-center tickets for the Aretha Franklin concert to be held March 31 in Hill Auditorium.

Special thanks to *The Ann Arbor News* for donating the concert tickets. And special thanks to Depot Exchange's Steve Gross for netting $590 for the Association in the raffle.

DATELINE: DEPOT TOWN

- Aubree's new awnings and sign celebrate new second floor plan
- City Body addition covers 10,000 sq. ft.
- Shankwiler's Artrain building has new owner/residents in place
- Volunteers come through once more for jazz events in the district.

May flowers proliferate

Through the cooperation of the Historic South Side Association, Ypsilanti's neighborhood colors will be more coordinated this year. Three colors of petunias will be available for all planters in the district at less than cost. Anyone planning to tend a bed this summer should check out these possibilities through the Thursday night meetings at The Old Caboose.

Can you dig it? Heck yes!

Who owns most of the flower beds in Depot Town? They're really on City property, but the City doesn't plant them. Locals plant them.

And you can. In fact, you can dig them up, fertilize them, plant them, water them and weed them. All or any subdivision of the above. And *everyone* enjoys the blooms which last through October.

DDA plan dumped by City Council

Ypsilanti City Council voted against the proposal to unify the Depot Town Downtown Development Authority by filling-in the five holes in the current map of the District. April 16 saw City Council packets presented without the Depot Town DDA responses to the City Attorney's opinion that such action was not appropriate, according to his view of the State Attorney General's opinion.

City Attorney, John Barr, opined last fall, that such additions could not be made without proving the same loss of property value shown when the District was established. Tom Martin, a staffer from the State Department of Commerce, held a differing point of view, but City staffers neglected to include that in the April presentation.

David Kircher, owner of the Thompson Block, suggested that property owners simply "donate cash to the District -- if they want to see neighborhood improvements" and complained about the new curbs, sidewalks and street lights in front of his building. He said he would have improved his building too, "but the City gave all the money to the drug dealers."

City Body owner, Scott Sobbry, petitioned Council to bring his much-improved property into the District for the good of the community, but Council demurred. Other properties still excluded are the Ninde Street garage, Miller Motors, and Olde Towne Coin & Gold.

Virtually every member of Council voted to defeat the proposal which has been gaining neighborhood support for the last ten months.

A 1990 Jazz calendar for Depot Town

June 22, 23, 24, 1990

Frog Island
Zydeco, Gospel
Blues & Jazz

"Green," "Jazz,' and "Frog" themes to be featured in June

• Green helium balloons will highlight those businesses participating in the Frog Island Jazz promotion on June 22, 23,24.

• Rod Wing, an antique dealer from Cross Street Antiques, has fashioned a commemorative metal sign (green & white, of course) for the event and is offering the collector's item at $8 per.

• Window displays and special menu items will also call attention to the three-day musical event happening on Frog Island late in the month.

Merchants are encouraged to return the questionnaire to *The Rag* to feature their special events and sales next month.

June printings elaborate

The plan for an eight-page *Rag* to connect the district with Frog Island's musical events in June has grown to two publications for next month:

• *The Rag* will retain its regular six-page format with announcements of 'specials' from its many regular sponsors. Its 1500 copies will continue to be "100% Rag Free Content."

• The *Frog Island Jazz Program* will be a 12-page hype of all three daily musical programs (biographies, features, area highlights, history of the Festival, etc.) accompanied by paid ads from both in and out of the district. The program will be on sale for a nominal amount the weekend of the event to raise funds toward sponsoring the August Heritage Jazz Competition.

The two pieces will look similar, since they'll be products of the same Macintosh computer program and will use the familiar page design of the monthly *Rag*. Some of the writing style should fit the district's usual mode, as well. Watch for both issues in June.

Deadlines for each publication:
May 15 via The Old Caboose.

DTA to sponsor Macker B'ball team

Ed Orlowski, Depot Town resident and architect, will see his Gus Macker competition team sponsored by the Association -- and middle-aged DTA members are breathing a sigh of relief. Until Ed's proposal was made, the 'old hands' figured they had to don spandex shorts and T-shirts emblazoned with "Gut Smackers" to represent the block in the May events. (See announcement below)

Good luck, team. You look better in those shorts than any combination of DTA's board.

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Tarnished goose:

Edison not guilty of questionable park deeds

At April's DTA meeting, the monthly award for klutzy behavior on the block was given to the wrong person (and are DTA officials' faces red!). Turns out it wasn't Detroit Edison who chopped out limbs and lights from the trees in Riverside Park -- but the deed was that of trainees of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

Much dead wood was removed and the 'widow-makers' no longer hover above the park's strollers or festival booths.

Whether seen as necessary and prudent trimming or enthusiastic over-kill, Detroit Edison gets neither credit nor blame. It wasn't them.

In the midst of straightening out the miscommunication, Edison's Al Shelton continued to make good on his loyal service to the district and its many promotions and projects. DTA hopes to do as well in reciprocity.

GUS MACKER 3-ON-3 TOURNAMENT®

The Gus Macker 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament started as pick-up basketball in 1974 by Scott McNeal (alias Gus Macker) on a driveway basketball court in Lowell, Michigan. Growing from a few friends playing competitively for a trophy to national prominence in communities all across the United Sates, each year it provides thousands of players and spectators with a weekend full of family entertainment and competition.

Three-person teams of various age and talent levels pay a $60.00 team registration fee. Teams are placed in divisions by a computer according to their abilities and other characteristics. Trophies are then awarded in each of the Team Divisions.

Since moving its headquarters to Belding, Michigan, the Gus Macker has continued to grow because the basic essence of the event as family entertainment has been preserved.

YPSILANTI, MI
Tournament date: May 19, 20
Contact: Gus Macker - Ypsilanti
Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce
125 North Huron
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

Parking in Limbo

'Coal Yard' parking closed, open, closed, open again. Maybe.

April saw some action on the 'coal yard' parking space behind the Sidetrack which has been barricaded with dirt piles for a year and a half.

One business/property owner was able to forge a 30-day rental deal in which time it was hoped to find enough neighborhood support on the south side of Cross Street to maintain the 30-car lot for customer use.

Alas, only two property owners and one business manager showed support, and they quickly agreed that they could not bear the cost of rent and liability insurance with their small numbers. Others who showed earlier interest did not show up for the meeting.

At month's end, enough local support had surfaced to justify keeping the lot open for a second month, but no long-range view is available through the complex negotiations.

What will happen with the property in question? The owners are reported to be under a court order to remove the unsightly dirt piles -- but are not obligated to provide free parking.

Neighborhood wags have noted that there was 'no problem' in the 'old days,' when the lot was open to everyone and no one had to take any responsibility for its maintenance.

YPSI DIXIT:

"Loosing thirty parking spaces for a year and a half didn't hurt my business one bit."

(If that's the case, why not cut out thirty more -- just to see where the cut-off is?)

Promotional flyers gone. Is new model imminent?

More than 20,000 of the slick red, black and white brochures touting "30 exciting shops and a few dull ones" have been distributed through supporting local businesses, the Antique Dealers Association and the Ypsilanti Visitors & Convention Bureau in the last year.

"We're down to our last hundred, and that won't last through the end of the month," say staffers in the old Breakey mansion on North Huron Street. The flyer's interior panel showed a map of the district with sponsoring businesses highlighted.

Local businesses are being polled once again for support for the creation of the fourth printing of such promotional material in the last decade. As with the previous publication, which cost about $30 per business, local support must come before the actual printing.

Depot Town artist's quilt in the Big Apple

Depot Town artist, Mary Gentry, took first place in this spring's Birmingham art show with her elegant quilt which has been featured in recent neighborhood exhibitions. Then the piece was off to NYC's Gracie Mansion and was subsequently shown in posh New York art galleries.

The narrative piece describes her family's trip to Chicago in folk art style, but carries Mary's wry sense of humor and elegant craftsmanship throughout.

And it all started in a little studio on East Cross Street.

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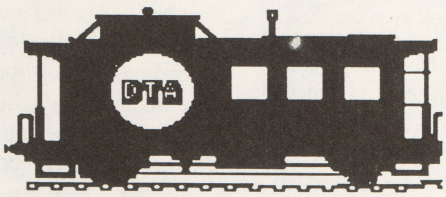
The Depot Town Association, Inc. April 19

Guests: Al Shelton, Detroit Edison representative.

Minutes of 15 March 1990 were approved as read.



Al Shelton offered a clarification on behalf of Detroit Edison and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers regarding the Golden Goose Award of March 15. The award winning tree trimmers were members of the I.B.E.W. who were being observed by inspectors determining apprenticeship journeyman status. The trimmers do not work as direct employees of Detroit Edison.

Treasurer's report: General fund = $1746.05. Raffle revenue (Heritage jazz benefit fund) $590.00. DTA president, Paul Fetters will review the DTA's financial records of the past two years.

Budget/Events: The Heritage Festival benefit concert is ready to roll for Saturday, April 21. 3-4,000 flyers were mailed out and more were available from local merchants. Advance "big thank-yours" go out to WEMU for its advertising attention and to the local businesses that have worked so well, so hard, and so together to revive "the Heritage Festival Jazz Competition" in Depot Town.

A benefit raffle, organized by Steve Gross, awarded four tickets to see Aretha Franklin @ the Fox Theater and awarded $590.00 of profit to the Heritage Festival Jazz fund. Another benefit raffle is planned for this Saturday night featuring tickets for a Janet Jackson concert.

An agreement defining the co-sponsorship of the Frog Island Festival has not been reached. Points of contention include the future production of the festival brochure.

"Time Travels in Fashion," a multimedia show featuring 100 years of music, song, and dance will be presented at the Ypsilanti Freighthouse May 6 at 4:30pm. The event will showcase area artists and businesses, along with some local celebrities.

Membership/Volunteers: Volunteer organizer, Tom Dodd, claims to be finding a whole new crop willing to work for the Heritage Benefit. We hope they'll continue in our community's tradition of volunteerism.

Rag report: Upon receipt of written confirmation from The Ark, Rag editor will begin editing the Frog Island Festival program. Plans are to produce the program in the format of an expanded Depot Town Rag. It will feature articles on our neighborhood and The Ark, in addition to the featured artists and musical styles. Advertising space will be made available to The Rag's sponsors.

The Rag will feature a poll of our readers and sponsors regarding the issue of accepting advertising from businesses outside of Depot Town.

The Depot Town flyer produced last year was so successful that it's almost gone. A printing of 20,000 distributed to local hotels and tourist centers is running low. DTA authorized an update to be produced.

An archival collection of the Depot Town Rag will be made available to EMU library for a price of $50.00.

Caboose: To hold your next event in the old Caboose, give $25.00, a $10 key deposit, and a reservation to Gary McKeever @483-4256.

Other business:

- Jerry Meadows will report back with an estimate on repainting the red caboose in the Depot Town sign on the Follett House.

- The DDA is consulting with planning professionals regarding the development of the Depot Town master plan update.

- The DDA's petition to include five additional properties within the District was denied by City Council, in response to a legal opinion offered by City Attorney, John Barr. The Depot Town DDA is seeking a further opinion form the office of the State Attorney General.

- The current status of the south Cross Street parking lot is open for business.

- DTA will donate $100 to the Ypsilanti CBC to offset our lack of participation in this year's Riverside Park Easter Egg Hunt.

- The Chamber of Commerce participated in a marketing meeting regarding Depot Town and the upcoming Gus Macker Tournament to be held in Ypsilanti May 19 & 20.

- DTA unanimously agreed to a $60.00 fee to sponsor a Gus Macker team (of four) to be captained by Depot Towner, Ed Orlowski.

Golden Goose Award: To those who 'helped' us celebrate Earth Day by gluing unwanted posters on our doors and windows — truly oxymoronic action. Was that glob of glue biodegradable!?

Best Yet Award: To those with the incentive to do something new with something old; we are looking forward to the success of "Time Travels in Fashion."

Special thanks: To all who helped make the April 21 Blues Fest a tremendous success. Espcially Aubree's, Red Rooseter, Sidetrack and the 50 har4d working volunteers. Jazz is back!

Membership tear-off:

√ Regular voting membership (for property and business owners) = $25 per year.
√ Associate membership (monthly mailing of The Rag) = $10 per year.
√ Patron membership = $100 for life.

Send your check to DTA,
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

May 1990

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Development Authority (DDA)
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 5/10
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 5/17
The Old Caboose

Antique Engine Club
7:00 p.m. Thursday, 5/24
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THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

Depot Town Association, Inc.
Paul Fetters, president
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

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Memories of the "Early Depot Town"

Joe Thompson remembers: The south side of Cross Street

I have been asked a number of times to give my impression of the Depot section just after 1900.

I was born on Maple Street very close to this area so I think I have a pretty good idea of the business section and some of the merchants and their activities in this part of the city. The east side had many names: The East Side, Depot Town, Cross Street, Down Town as opposed to Up-Town.

South side of Cross Street . . .

Let's go back across the river now on the South side of Cross Street. The first building that I remember there was a law office where lawyer Lee M. Brown held forth *[City Body office?]*. He was the attorney for all the Depot people that needed to go to law *[City Body garage?]*. Next to that law office, George W. Hayes had a grocery *[Dragon's Lair Futons]*. And east of that grocery was John Engel Cartage and Coal office *[Old Town Restaurant?]* behind which he had an extensive barn and owned a number of teams of horses and drays that did the hauling around the Depot section. A junk dealer, Mr. Louis Cramer, was quite an operator. He had a little store and bought all the junk that was available a the time. Next to Mr. Cramer's place of business was a cigar store that was operated by Mr. Chris Duress *[Old Town's main entry]*. They called him "Doc," for he concocted a remedy that he claimed would restore lost manhood. He filled his window one day with this remedy and the sun came through the window pretty bright and the bottles exploded and blew out the front windows so I guess he did away with his remedy after that experience. Tommy Duffy had a shoe repair shop right next door *(Old Town's east dining room]* and took care of all the people's wants repairing their shoes.

Now we'll go up Cross Street a little bit farther east. A man by the name of Fremont Paterson had a store which was a bakery and candy store*[Ike's Depot Barbershop]*. He was also an inventor. He invented what they called a unicycle. It was a big, tall wheel and he was suspended in the center of it. I saw him come down Cross Street hill and wreck it one day and that was the last we ever heard of the unicycle. Charley Smith had a meat market next door *[Occasion Station]*. I guess in those days they called it a butcher shop, and outside of the city they had a slaughter house where the cattle were killed and then brought in and sold at retail. Joel Grieve had a bakery next door *[Bell, Book & Candle]* and I used to deliver for him on Saturdays. When we came back at night what bread we had left we fed the horse. Davis and Company had a grocery and drygoods store which did an extensive business *[Occasion Station]*.

Across the alley A.A. Bedell had a shoe store *[Hon's Flowers]* and next was the Justice of the Peace office *[River Artworks]* where they held trials and Squire Beach was, as I remember, the judge and following him was Frank Joslin. Upstairs over these two stores was the Maccabee Hall *[Dodd residence]* and it used to be called the Masonic Hall but they moved up town and the Maccabees took it over. Peter Ranson had a barber shop next door *[Big Bob's Magazines]* and Clyde Roe a restaurant next to him *[Artrain building]*. There was next door what the people called a "horse exchange" *[Depot Exhange]* It was where a bunch of gamblers came out from Detroit every day on the Michigan Central and it was what they called "off-track betting." Large black-boards lined the halls and the race results came in from around the country by wire and these men would bet the same as they do today at the horse races only there weren't any horses in sight. That place was run by Warren Lewis and it was very thriving for a number of years until George Burke was elected prosecutor and he closed it up. Upstairs over the horse exchange was a house of ill-repute. "Ma" Bush was the landlady and, of course, that completed the business section in that neighborhood.

Nick Max had a saloon adjacent *[Sidetrack]* and Dick Wilbur operated a cigar store on the corner which is now removed. It was hit by a train and it still shows the scars of where the train struck the building. Later, on that corner, there was a food counter and I remember Mr. Bicraft, where you could go to get a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

. . . and south on River Street

Down River Street, a ways south, was a foundry and a machine shop *[Millworks Building - Food Co-op, et al]* where they made flour mill machinery. Mr. Charles Ferrier and Mr. George Walterhouse operated this. Next to them was a blacksmith shop *[recently Bar-Gan Auto Rental]* run by Otto Hohn. Of course, all the horses had to be shod in those days and this was one place they could take them.

Now, on the southeast corner of River and Cross was the Ypsilanti Electric Company *[Miller Motors]* that furnished electric lights for the city in the homes and business, only there was no power generated at that time. It only ran at night because there wasn't any use of electricity in the day time. There were two plants in Ypsilanti - one that furnished the city lights and the water works and the other building furnished the lights for the homes. I remember our home at 108 Maple Street was the first one that was wired in Ypsilanti because it was the closest one to the plant. George Essinger came in with his wire. None of the wires were concealed. They just ran up the walls and and across the ceilings except that they took the gas fixtures and rewired them for electric which were quite ornamental. Later this electric plant was sold to Edison Company. **Next month:** Four closing anecdotes — scams, smokes, stamps & streetcars, and the Follett House scam.

ATTENTION: Librarians, historians, archivists:

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Dear Rag:

I enjoyed, again, reading Dad's memories of Depot Town early 1900's. I remember my grandfather's place of business. It was fun going to visit it in 1927 and 1928. I believe he sold it in 1929.

Please not new addres re: *The Rag* which I look forward to.

- William B. Thompson, Tucson, Arizona
  Father - Joseph H.
  Grandfather - Ben D.
  Great grandfather - O.E.
  Great great grandfather - Ben

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